



Cohort Graduation and Dropout Rates Frequently Asked Questions

1. How is the 2010 cohort four-year graduation rate calculated?

The 2010 cohort four-year graduation rate is calculated by tracking individual students who first enrolled in ninth grade during the 2006-07 school year (assigned to the 2010 cohort) and graduated four years later with a regular diploma. It accounts for students who transfer in and out of the district, who leave school permanently, who leave school during one school year and return in another, or who are retained in a grade but stay in school and graduate later than their original classmates.

2. How is the 2010 cohort four-year dropout rate calculated?

There is no national standard for calculating cohort four-year dropout rates. Michigan has chosen to maintain consistency by using the graduation cohort methodology recommended by the National Governors Association (NGA) and in compliance with the United States Department of Education (USED) guidance to calculate this rate.

The 2010 cohort four-year dropout rate is calculated by tracking individual students who first enrolled in ninth grade during the 2006-07 school year (assigned to the 2010 cohort) and left high school permanently at any time during the four-year period prior to completion or whose whereabouts are unknown.

3. Why do a school's graduation and dropout rates not add up to 100 percent?

A dropout rate is not equivalent to subtracting the graduation rate from 100 percent because that method would count students who are "other completers" or "off-track continuing" as dropouts, which they are not. "Other completers" are students who earned a General Educational Development (GED), certificate, or reached the special education maximum age. Students in the "off-track continuing" category are those who did not complete high school in four years and are still continuing in school.

4. Why do some building rates not add up to the district rates, or district rates not add up to the state rates?

There are two calculation rules that may result in building rates not adding up to district rates, and district rates not adding up to state rates:

1. Court-Ordered Facilities: Buildings in which students who have been ordered by the court to attend are included only in the building rate, not in the district's rate. This method prevents a district from being held accountable for the performance of students who would normally not be present in the district, while still allowing for accountability for the building that provides the public education.
2. "Count Dates": Michigan collects data on students twice a year on "count dates" (one day in September and one in February) for the purposes of calculating state school aid payments and required state and federal reporting. Students attending on count day are reported as continuing in the district during a fall or spring submission. Accommodations are made for students who attend school but were absent on count day (e.g., if children have an excused absence on count day, they must return within 30 school days. If an

unexcused absence occurs, students must return in 10 school days, etc.). In order to ensure that the graduation rate calculation aligns with the Michigan Department of Education's (MDE) full academic year requirement outlined in the Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook, students must be in attendance in a building for at least two count dates (consecutive or not) to be included in that building's calculation. Students must be in attendance at a district for at least one count date to be included in a district's calculations. Students who are claimed in a district, but were not present for any count days are only included in the state rate.

5. How are dropout rates calculated for buildings from which students do not graduate?

Some schools in Michigan offer 9th, 9th–10th, and 9th–11th-grade campuses, from which students do not graduate, and thus these schools do not have a cohort for a complete four years. The cohort total for such a building is determined by the number of students who were reported in attendance at the building for two or more count days who may have transferred out of the building, but did not transfer out of the district by the time they were last reported. The number of dropouts reported from that building is divided by the number of students who attended the building for two or more count days at any point during the four years (potential dropouts) during the same time period. This total was only computed for buildings for which no graduates were reported.

6. Which students are not counted in the graduation and dropout rates (exempt)?

The students categorized as "exempt" are students who transferred out of the public school system (out of state, to nonpublic school or home school) or are deceased.

Nonpublic or home school students who are reported by the district are no longer considered "exempt," but rather are excluded from the cohort altogether as they are only receiving non-core services.

7. What if a school mistakenly reported a student in the wrong category?

The Graduation/Dropout Review within the Michigan Student Data System (MSDS) provides district authorized users the ability to change the: 1) Primary Education Providing Entity (PEPE), which determines district and building level accountability; 2) Cohort year and 3) Exit status of a student's record. PEPE and cohort year change requests require approval by the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI). Any modifications that have not been approved are not changed. District authorized users can submit a change to a student's exit status through the Student Record Maintenance Collection (SRM) in the MSDS.

8. How do you know districts are not inflating their data to report more positive numbers?

Each public school student in Michigan is assigned a Unique Identification Code (UIC), which is used by districts when submitting data to CEPI. Grade-to-grade progression, exit statuses and transfers into and out of districts are tracked using the UIC. If a district were to report a student as transferred out to another district, the other district should report that student with the same UIC in its subsequent submission. If the new district does not report that UIC, the record is a missing expected record and becomes a "dropout" record for the original district.

After the review window in the MSDS closes in September, the data go through an auditing process that is completed by intermediate school district (ISD) auditors, as identified in the MDE audit manual.

9. Why does the four-year on-time graduation rate only count students who graduate in four years?

In 2001, Congress adopted the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act*, which requires states to use a graduation rate that counts only graduates who receive a regular diploma in four years or less as successful graduates. Cohort five-year and cohort six-year graduation rates are available for

those students who required additional time to complete. If these students did graduate from high school with a diploma, these students are considered graduates in the five-year or six-year rate, depending on how much time they needed to complete.

10. If a student drops out of high school, is every high school that student attended held accountable?

No. Accountability is assigned to only one school and/or district and is determined by which entity is the PEPE. For example, the entity that reported the terminating exit status of the student is held accountable. If multiple entities report a student in a collection, the entity reporting the greater proportion of full-time equivalency (FTE) membership is accountable. Additionally, if accountability still cannot be determined from multiple records, the student goes into "resolution." Until the state assigns the new PEPE, the entity that last had accountability retains accountability.

11. What are the cohort five-year graduation and dropout rates?

The cohort five-year graduation rate includes students who were categorized as "off-track continuing" at the end of four years and graduated in the fifth year with a high school diploma. The five-year graduation rate is calculated in the same manner as the four-year rate, with the addition of students who graduated in the fifth year (off-track graduated) in the numerator. "On-track graduated" and "off-track graduated" are counted as the numerator and divided by the total count of all categories (on-track graduated, off-track graduated, off-track continuing, other completer and dropout). Transfers-in and out during that fifth year are accounted for as well.

The cohort five-year dropout rate is calculated in the same manner as the four-year rate, with the addition of students who dropped out of high school in their fifth year. Transfers in and out during that fifth year are accounted for as well. Remember, the cohort five-year rates count all students in the cohort at the end of five years; these rates do not just include those students in the cohort who finished in the fifth year.

12. What are the cohort six-year graduation and dropout rates?

The cohort six-year graduation rate includes students who were categorized as "off-track continuing" at the end of five years and graduated in the sixth year with a regular high school diploma. The six-year graduation rate is calculated in the same manner as the five-year rate, with the addition of students who graduated in the sixth year (off-track 5+ graduated) in the numerator. "On-track graduated", "off-track graduated" and "off-track 5+ graduated" are counted as the numerator and divided by the total count of all categories (on-track graduated, off-track graduated, off-track 5+ graduated, off-track continuing, off-track 5+ continuing, other completer and dropout). Transfers in and out during that sixth year are accounted for as well.

The cohort six-year dropout rate is calculated in the same manner as the five-year rate, with the addition of students who dropped out of high school in their sixth year. Transfers in and out during that sixth year are accounted for as well. As in the five-year rates, the six-year rates count all students in the cohort at the end of six years; these rates do not just include those students in the cohort who finished in the sixth year.

13. Why are the cohort four-year, five-year and six-year rates different?

A building or district's cohort graduation and dropout rates could be greater than, less than or equal to the prior year's rates for that cohort. There are three reasons for this variance: 1) total number of count dates in attendance, 2) the numerator changes and 3) changes in the denominator.

1. The total number of count dates a student is in attendance also impacts the difference between the same cohort's rates. Students who, in their fifth or sixth year, now meet the minimum number of count dates in attendance will be included in that district's and/or

building's rates. For example, if a 2009 cohort student was at a building for one count date in the 2008-09 school year, that student was counted in the district rate only. If, in the student's fifth year, that off-track student attended for another count date in the same building, that student would now be included in the building's five-year rates.

2. Students who have since received their standard diploma are now included in the numerator as five-year or six-year graduates. Likewise, students who have dropped out in later years are included in the numerator for the five-year or six-year dropout rate.
3. According to the federal regulations released in 2008, states cannot freeze cohorts. Once a cohort has graduated, the cohort total (the denominator used in the graduation and dropout rates) cannot be "locked" at that total. The cohort total must remain "open" to allow accountability to be placed with the correct entity for students who attend high school beyond the fourth year.

14. Why is my five-year or six-year subgroup smaller than the four-year subgroup?

Because subgroups are calculated based on the penultimate status (second to the last collection a student was reported in), it is feasible for a student to no longer be part of a subgroup in their fifth or sixth year. For example, the student may have been part of the limited English proficiency (LEP) subgroup for the 4-year rate, but is no longer eligible for LEP services in the fifth year and hence is removed from the LEP subgroup.

15. How is the cohort four-year graduation methodology different than what the state used previously?

Prior to the 2007 cohort, which was the first time Michigan moved to the cohort methodology, graduation rates were determined by using an "estimated" rate derived by multiplying the four graduating class retention rates together in a single year. Class retention rates were determined by taking one graduation class (grade) at a time and dividing the fall enrollment by the previous fall's enrollment. This average rate was then multiplied by 100 to get the graduation rate percentage. Basically, this formula utilized one year of data to derive a four-year estimated rate.

The cohort four-year formula (described in FAQ question #1) provides a more accurate rate to assist schools and districts in targeting education policies to assist greater numbers of students to succeed in school and earn their diplomas. In addition, this calculation aligns with the guidelines provided by the NGA Graduation Counts Compact, the USED regulations, and complies with the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*.

16. How is the cohort four-year dropout methodology different than what the state used previously?

Prior to the 2007 cohort, which was the first time Michigan moved to the cohort methodology, dropout rates were the percentage of unaccounted-for students at the secondary level for a school year. It was derived by subtracting the secondary school's/facility's total retention rate (described in FAQ #3) from 100 percent. Class retention rates were determined by taking one graduation class (grade) at a time and dividing the fall enrollment by the previous fall's enrollment.

17. Why did Michigan change the graduation and dropout rate formulas?

In 2001, Congress adopted the *No Child Left Behind Act*, which requires states to use a graduation rate that tracks only "on-time" graduates who receive regular diplomas. To help states meet this goal, the NGA convened a task force to help states develop a way to measure high school graduation rates. All 50 governors committed to adopting this methodology to track graduation rates in their states. In 2008, the USED released guidance on using a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate.

Although neither NCLB, the NGA, nor USED requires a change in the dropout rate calculation, Michigan created a dropout rate for consistency with the use of the cohort four-year graduation rate. Like the cohort four-year graduation rate, this formula provides a more accurate rate to assist schools, districts, and intermediate school districts in targeting education policies to help students succeed in school and earn a diploma.

18. Why are some dropout rates higher than what has been previously reported?

By using a cohort four-year dropout rate, we are totaling dropout events that occur over a four-year period, rather than just a one-year period, as the previous rate reported. In addition, by tracking individual students as they progress through high school, we are better able to determine exactly what happened to each student. The cohort methodology rates do not necessarily mean that a school has experienced an increase in dropouts when compared to older rates, only that the rate depicts a more accurate measure over a longer timeframe than was previously reported.

19. Why are some cohort graduation rates lower than what has been previously reported (when not using the cohort methodology)?

The use of a more accurate formula results in some schools and districts in Michigan seeing a change in their graduation rates. This does not necessarily mean that more or fewer students were graduating from high school, only that the rates depict a more accurate picture than what was previously reported. A number of changes in the cohort formula could have impacted a building or district's rate:

1. The cohort four-year graduation rate counts only students who completed a regular diploma in four years as on-time graduates.
2. Alternative high schools are included in the district calculation.
3. Both the graduation and dropout rates more accurately account for transfers-in and transfers-out of the district.

20. How are students with disabilities counted in the cohort four-year graduation formula?

Students receiving special education services are part of the cohort. Many students with disabilities receiving special education services graduate with the rest of their cohort in four years, with the help of support services provided by the district. If the student does not graduate in the four-year period, the student is categorized as "off-track."

21. Will the graduation rates be available by subgroups?

Yes, CEPI publishes graduation rates by subgroup, including race/ethnicity, gender, students with disabilities, migrant, economically disadvantaged and LEP. Students are placed in a subgroup based on the status reported in the previous count submission. In addition, rates are available for race/ethnicity by gender. This information is available on CEPI's Web site at www.michigan.gov/cepi.

22. Requests could be made to give students in the 2007 cohort a one-year extension. Why is this option not available for students in the later cohorts? Is this the same as a cohort year change?

In the 2007 Graduation and Dropout Review and Comment Application (GAD), extensions removed students from their cohort and placed them into the next cohort. For example, students in the 2007 cohort receiving this one-year extension were moved into the 2008 cohort and are not reflected in the 2007 cohort status categories. These extensions were allowed on a case-by-case basis. However, the fifth-year extension request is no longer available. According to federal regulations released in 2008, once a student has been placed into a cohort, the student cannot be moved from that cohort. Therefore, this functionality in GAD was disabled and

reversed for 2007 cohort students. Students who received this one-year extension were reflected in the 2007 cohort five-year rates.

Students attending middle colleges are provided with five-years to complete and as such are moved to a subsequent cohort. More information is provided in FAQ 27.

A cohort year change request should not be mistaken as an extension request. A cohort year change request is to be used if the student was incorrectly placed into the cohort (e.g., data was submitted with the wrong UIC, a district mistakenly reported a kindergarten student as a ninth-grader, etc.).

23. It appears CEPI is using smaller cohort enrollment numbers than the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Why is this the case?

Several factors contribute to a difference in the populations that make up the two numbers. The factor with the greatest impact is that the ninth-grade headcount/enrollment total is the number of ninth-graders reported to CEPI. This is what NCES is using. However, the first-time ninth-graders total reported in the Cohort Graduation Rate Reports excludes ninth-grade students who were also reported by districts as ninth-graders previously. Those who were retained in ninth-grade were excluded, as they would have been already assigned to a previous cohort the first time they were reported as a ninth-grader.

Another factor that results in a lower number of first-time ninth-graders under the cohort methodology is related to an ongoing data quality improvement process. Since the ninth-grade headcount totals were generated, the process has allowed multiple UICs for a single student to be linked. This process resulted in a lower total number of active identifiers when the cohort totals were produced.

Another factor could be the cohort assignment methodology. This methodology uses an age-to-grade conversion to place ungraded students into a cohort based on their age, whereas the headcount files used by NCES report those students in an ungraded setting. When developing the cohort method, it was determined that the state would convert records for ungraded students into "grades" based upon the age of the student. This way, every student gets assigned to an appropriate cohort.

Because of these different populations, you will rarely find an exact match between the ninth-grade headcount total and the first-time ninth-grade cohort total reported for any entity.

24. Why does a middle school or elementary school building appear in the graduation and dropout report?

If a middle school or elementary school appears in the graduation and dropout report, this entity reported a student in the ninth grade or higher after that student had been assigned to a cohort.

25. Why are some national statistics reporting different rates for Michigan than what Michigan is reporting for itself?

There are different calculations that may result in discrepancies between reported statistics:

- 1) These discrepancies are the result of using a one-year incident/event rate verses a cohort four-year rate. CEPI calculates both depending on reporting needs. These two calculations are very different numbers and measure very different things. The cohort four-year rate is calculated at the end of four years, whereas the event rate counts an event (e.g., dropouts) each year. If a student, for example, drops out of high school and returns, and then does this again during the four-year period, this student would not be counted as a dropout at the end of four years in the cohort rate. (If he/she were to drop out again, he/she would be counted as a single dropout over the four-year period. If

he/she returns and completes high school, he/she would never be counted as a dropout.) In the event rate, however, this student would be counted twice: once for each time the student dropped out.

- 2) *Diplomas Count* uses the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) method to calculate the percent of public high school students who graduate on time with a diploma. The CPI method multiplies grade promotion ratios together to produce the graduation rate. This process does not take into account the mobility of families and the ultimate success of students who often attend other districts to complete their studies. This situation is common in large urban districts. The cohort process uses exact tracking of students to ensure better accuracy in the rates.

26. Why does the cohort subgroup report show cells with less than 5 percent listed as "< 5%" and those with more than 95 percent listed as "> 95%"?

According to federal regulations released in 2008 on Information and De-Identified Records (§§ 99.3 and 99.31(b)), "States must adopt a strategy for dealing with a situation in which all students in a particular subgroup scored at the same achievement level. One solution, referred to as 'masking' the data, is to use the notation of '> 95%' when all students in a subgroup score at the same achievement level."

27. How are middle college students counted in the cohort four-year graduation and dropout rates?

Middle college students are eligible to be considered "on-time graduates" after five years if they complete high school with both an advanced certificate and a diploma. If the student takes five years to complete high school and only received a high school diploma, he or she is considered to be "off-track graduated." Students who are reported as continuing at the end of four years and are in an approved middle college setting are considered to be "on-track continuing." After five years, the final graduation status is determined as either "off-track graduate" or "on-track graduate."

28. Why am I seeing a difference between the cohort year and expected graduation year for my early/middle college students?

The additional year is not added to the Expected Graduation Year (EGY) until the second year the student is submitted in 12th grade. The student does remain "on-track continuing."

29. Which schools/facilities do not receive graduation and/or dropout rates?

- 1) An entity identified as a ninth-grade building may have a dropout rate, but will not have a completion or graduation rate.
- 2) An entity identified as an ISD school that does not graduate students may have a dropout rate, but will not have a completion or graduation rate.
- 3) Career and technical education (CTE) facilities and math/science centers are not considered accountable entities and will not receive graduation or dropout rates.

30. How are ungraded students identified as members of a cohort?

Students reported in educational setting "14" (special education ungraded setting) are assigned to a cohort using a computed grade (age minus 6). These students will only be placed into a cohort if they are at least 15 years old and less than 26 as of September 1st of the current school year. If the student is beyond the age of 18, the student will be included in cohort calculations. Schools will be held accountable for these students.

Students who are reported in a traditional grade, assigned to a cohort and subsequently reported in adult education (educational setting "20") will be counted as "other high school completers" if they receive their GED certificate or "off-track graduated" if they receive their high school diploma. While reported as an active "20," they will be "off-track continuing." These

students will not be assigned to a cohort if the first time they are reported is with an educational setting of "20."

31. What graduation codes should I use for Adult Ed students?

Adult Ed students who receive a high school diploma should be exited with exit status code "03- Graduated from an alternative program with a high school diploma." Adult Ed students who receive their GED certificate should be exited with exit status code "05-Complete general education with an equivalency certificate (GED)".

32. Is there any way to find out which students get a GED without contacting the agency the student received it from?

A student's GED scores cannot be released unless the student has given the agency authorization to disclose the results.